

**Australian Medical Association Limited**  
**ABN 37 008 426 793**

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**GREATER INVESTMENT IN INDIGENOUS HEALTH WOULD  
 REDUCE NEED FOR PROTESTS**

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that greater investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, and concerted action to end institutional racism in Australia, would go a long way towards reducing the need for large protest rallies, such as those planned for this weekend around the country.

Dr Bartone said the reasons why many thousands of Australians are wanting to protest against racism and discrimination can no longer be ignored – and must be addressed.

“The AMA stands with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They suffer health disparities that see them become sicker and die earlier than non-Indigenous Australians.

“In usual times, many doctors and medical students would be marching in these protests. We want to see change.

“But we cannot allow the coronavirus pandemic continue to affect our way of life. We must stop the spread of COVID-19.

“I urge everyone to strictly follow public health orders to stay away from large gatherings this weekend.

“To those still wanting to organise protests this weekend, the AMA urges compliance with the different public health orders in place in each of the States and Territories.

“Australians must continue to comply with public health orders and avoid large gatherings. Cruise ships, footy crowds, or protest rallies are not yet safe.

“COVID-19 can be devastating for vulnerable members of the community including Indigenous people, the elderly, patients with chronic disease, and those who are immunocompromised.

“Mass gatherings like these protests can put not only attendees at risk, but also the people they later come in contact with.”

The emergence of the global Black Lives Matter movement has come at a time when mixed results of Australia’s Close the Gap initiatives warrant new investment.

Dr Bartone said that governments are rightly saying stay away from large gatherings, but these same governments must also address the calls made by protest leaders to act on racism.

“Instead of just saying ‘don’t protest’, our political leaders must outline how governments will step up and better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“The AMA is a founding supporter of the Close the Gap campaign.

“The campaign has seen some improvement in the lives of First Australians, but more needs to be done.

“As a nation, we can and must do more.”

The AMA has identified three priorities for immediate action to get real change started:

1. “Indigenous smoking rates, particularly in the Northern Territory, continue to remain far too high. We must recommit to smoking cessation within Indigenous communities.
2. “We need to train more First Australians to be involved in the delivery of health care as a means of reducing racism in our health system.
3. A proposal to establish an Indigenous Hospital at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane is sitting on the shelf, and just needs government backing to get it up and running.

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CONTACT:     John Flannery       02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761  
                  Maria Hawthorne    02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753